

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, RICHMOND BRANCH
2987 Almond Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6763
PA-6763

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, RICHMOND BRANCH

HABS No. PA-6763

Location: 2987 Almond Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia

Present Occupant: Free Library of Philadelphia

Present Use: branch library

Significance: Richmond was one of twenty-five branch libraries constructed between 1904 and 1930 by the Free Library of Philadelphia using a \$1.5 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie's public library construction grants were a major impetus for the growth of these institutions throughout the country. Philadelphia was second only to New York City in the size of the Carnegie grant it received and the number of branch libraries constructed. Each jurisdiction receiving Carnegie library funds was responsible for providing a site and operating expenses equal to ten percent of the cost of construction. Prior to receiving the Carnegie funds in 1903, branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia (founded 1891) were housed in a variety of preexisting structures. The Carnegie library construction campaign provided twenty-five purpose-built branch libraries for the City of Philadelphia, each designed according to new standards of library professionalism and using fashionable, but conservative, architectural forms and motifs.

Richmond was the eleventh Carnegie branch library opened by the Free Library of Philadelphia. Plans for the structure were approved by the Free Library Board of Trustees Carnegie Fund Committee on March 20, 1908 and the branch opened to the public on March 15, 1910. At the time of opening the Richmond branch served a predominantly Polish-American neighborhood in northeast Philadelphia and the library is still a prominent architectural and institutional presence in an area of two- and three-story residential structures. The Richmond Branch was designed by New York architect Edward L. Tilton. Tilton specialized in Carnegie library design and was frequently recommended by James Bertram, Carnegie's secretary, for library commissions.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: 1908-10, cornerstone ceremony October 28, 1908, opened March 15, 1910
2. Architect: Edward L. Tilton
3. Original and subsequent owners/uses: Free Library of Philadelphia branch library, 1910 to present.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:¹
 - General contract – Fred A. Havens, \$36,008.70
 - Heating - Roberts Leinau, \$4,104
 - Electrical - Keller-Pike Co., \$1,550
5. Original plans and construction: Edward Tilton's plans for the Richmond branch were approved by the Free Library Carnegie Fund Committee on March 20, 1908 and construction proceeded during 1908-10. A photograph of an elevation drawing for the library shows the building as constructed, except for a decorative diaper pattern in the upper portion of the exterior walls that was eliminated in favor of Flemish bond throughout. Presumably this feature, while more in keeping with the library's Tudor Revival motifs, would have been costlier to construct.²
6. Alterations and additions: The library retains its original appearance on the exterior. The interior spaces are largely intact but with changes in shelving, lighting and other fixtures. The Free Library had a major initiative in 1958-1962 to modernize its branch libraries, including Richmond, which received new floor coverings, new fixtures, and fluorescent lighting.³ More recently new light fixtures and floor coverings have been installed.

B. Historical Context:

In the nineteenth century most libraries in the United States were private or available only to subscribers. Starting in the late nineteenth century, many cities began to found "free library" systems to provide educational material and services to a wider array of citizens, particularly the burgeoning immigrant population. The Free Library of Philadelphia was founded in 1891 and proceeded to establish a central library and a network of neighborhood branches. Despite ambitious goals, however, these libraries remained rather modest affairs housed in rented space and utilizing mainly donated collections and volunteer staffing.

During this same period the library construction philanthropy of wealthy industrialist Andrew Carnegie would have a profound effect on both the development of professional

¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (1 July 1908).

² Photograph of Richmond Branch library rendering by E. L. Tilton, c. 1908, Free Library of Philadelphia Central Branch, Director's Vault Collection.

³ Photograph of Richmond Branch interior, 1966, Free Library of Philadelphia Central Branch, Director's Vault Collection.

library standards and the evolution of the building type. In January 1903, the Free Library of Philadelphia received a \$1.5 million grant from Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie Corporation to build thirty branch libraries.⁴ Carnegie had been engaged in library building philanthropy since 1886, but the program was expanded to jurisdictions outside of his personal and business spheres only in 1898. Carnegie library historian George Bobinski calls this later period the “wholesale phase” of Carnegie’s library philanthropy. From 1898 to 1919, he gave over \$39 million to 1,406 communities. The unprecedented scale of this effort contrasts with the “retail phase” between 1886 and 1898 when Carnegie donated \$1.8 million to six communities.⁵ The \$1.5 million gift to Philadelphia’s fledgling free library system was quite generous. Only New York City, which received a \$5.2 million grant for sixty-six libraries in 1899, built more branches using Carnegie funds. The next largest grants went to Baltimore and Cleveland; each city built fourteen libraries.⁶

In Philadelphia there was a delay while the various government agencies worked out a mechanism to legally accept and administer such unprecedented largesse. According to Bobinski, “the Pennsylvania State legislature had to approve an act authorizing the Philadelphia city council to enter into contracts with the trustees of the public library so that the arrangements necessary for receiving the Carnegie gift could be carried into effect.”⁷ After a year of bureaucratic maneuvering, the state legislature finally passed the law enabling the city to officially accept the gift. The final step before the Free Library could proceed was an ordinance approving this arrangement passed by Mayor John Weaver in January 1904. John Thomson quickly sent a letter to James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary and gatekeeper for the library philanthropy program, expressing his relief that the Free Library could move forward with branch construction:

I have the pleasure of informing you that I have this morning received from the Clerk of Councils official notice that the Mayor has signed the Ordinance accepting Mr. Carnegie’s splendid gift to the City of Philadelphia. The matter has been one of great anxiety. . . . Arrangements are on foot to accept 4 or 5 sites and it is hoped that the preliminary arrangements for locating the system of Branch Libraries, made possible by Mr. Carnegie’s munificence, will be put in active motion at once. . . . I think we shall be able very rapidly to show our appreciation of what Mr. Carnegie has put it in our power to do.⁸

⁴ While the original grant stipulated funding for 30 libraries at \$50,000 each, rising construction costs caused the number to be scaled back in 1918. For the remaining branches, the Carnegie funds provided only part of the construction cost with the city or neighborhood groups making up the difference. See letter from Librarian John Ashhurst to James Bertram, Secretary, Carnegie Corporation officially changing the total number of Carnegie branches to “25 or 26,” (11 October 1918), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁵ George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 13-14.

⁶ Bobinski, 229, 231.

⁷ Bobinski, 44.

⁸ Letter, John Thomson to James Bertram (13 January 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

The year-long delay in officially accepting the gift gave the Free Library time to quietly prepare to construct new branch buildings and move rapidly once approval came. Carnegie did not specify architectural designs or review plans at this time, but he did express a strong preference that the branch libraries include lecture rooms.⁹ In a letter officially accepting Carnegie's gift, Free Library Board of Trustees President Joseph G. Rosengarten noted that the Trustees "concur[red] fully" with his lecture room suggestion and planned to expand the already successful Free Library lecture program.¹⁰

The Board of Trustees of the Free Library formed a Carnegie Fund Committee in March 1904 to oversee the details of this ambitious branch building effort. In response to a request from the Carnegie Fund Committee for instructions on how to select architects, the Board of Trustees implemented an ad hoc system. They sought to avoid the expense and complication of holding competitions so instead proposed to appoint architects as branch sites were chosen. Selection seems to have been based on reputation and personal contacts, with some architects asking to be considered as work on the branches proceeded. The written record is thin on this point, but it is apparent that librarian John Thomson and assistant librarian John Ashhurst were instrumental in this process. John Thomson served as secretary of the Carnegie Fund Committee and the Free Library's leading staff member on all matters. Ashhurst's assistant librarian position was specifically created by the Board of Trustees "in order to undertake part of the very heavy extra work that would now be involved in carrying out the Andrew Carnegie Branch Library Building scheme."¹¹

In the interest of moving quickly to open new branch buildings, projects on donated or city-owned property typically were launched first. Later branches would be built on a mix of donated and purchased sites to ensure even distribution across the city. It was a site donation, combined with the existence of a successful but underdeveloped branch that inspired selection of the Richmond Branch for the eleventh Carnegie Fund library. Originally known as the Port Richmond Branch, this library opened as part of the Free Library system on December 13, 1898. For a year prior to this a traveling library provided lending library services from a small room at 2965 Richmond Street.¹² William Cramp and Sons Shipyard, a huge local industrial site along the Delaware River in the Port Richmond neighborhood, was instrumental in founding this branch. In 1905, the Free Library *Annual Report* praised the "good service" of this branch in circulating 1,200 technical books to the employees of Cramp's Shipyard and other industrial establishments. However the report lamented the fact that "the library occupies only one comparatively small room and it is impossible to hope that great things can be accomplished unless a new site and building can be provided."¹³

⁹ "Carnegie Offers \$1,500,000 to City," *Philadelphia Times*, 7 January 1903, clipping in Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁰ Letter, J. G. Rosengarten to Andrew Carnegie, (5 March 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, (12 February 1904).

¹² Free Library of Philadelphia, *Eighteenth Annual Report*, (1913), 7.

¹³ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Ninth Annual Report*, (1905), 18.

During 1907, Anna Weightman Walker (later Penfield) donated a 50 by 140 lot on Indiana Avenue (formerly Neff Street) between Almond and Mercer Streets for a new "Port Richmond" branch library. Walker was one of the wealthiest women in America at the time, having inherited \$60 million from her father, William Weightman, the "Quinine King," in 1905. Weightman's fortune came from his highly successful chemical plants. The city purchased an adjoining lot to the south to create a small park as a setting for the library in this densely populated neighborhood.¹⁴ The Free Library *Annual Report* specifically mentioned the predominantly Polish population to be served by this branch as some effort was being made to address a variety of ethnic groups throughout the city.¹⁵ A few years later the Richmond Branch was specifically mentioned in the *Annual Report* for its "Americanization" work of reaching out to the foreign born through their children.¹⁶

New York architect Edward Lippincott Tilton was chosen to design the Richmond Branch, a departure from the usual procedure of selecting local architects, although Tilton was included on the list of potential architects in 1904. Tilton was becoming known a specialist in library design and was a particular favorite of Carnegie's secretary, James Bertram. While Bertram and Carnegie never interfered in the choice of an architect or dictated design requirements, Bertram often did recommend Tilton or fellow New York architect Henry Whitfield when asked. Tilton consulted frequently with Bertram on matters of library design and construction. The architect demonstrated an understanding of programmatic requirements and budget practicality that earned Bertram's respect. It is likely that Tilton assisted with the production of Bertram's pamphlet "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings." These recommendations were sent with all Carnegie library grant offers starting in 1911.¹⁷

Tilton began his architectural career working in the office of McKim, Mead, and White, one of the preeminent Beaux-Arts architectural firms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1887 he traveled to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. From 1890 until 1900, Tilton practiced in partnership with William Boring. The highlight of their joint venture was winning the design competition for the U. S. Immigration Station on Ellis Island. By 1904, the partnership was formally dissolved. The partners remained friendly, but Boring continued on a more traditional course of seeking high-profile commissions while Tilton built a prolific practice on large numbers of smaller commissions, and a particular specialty in library design.¹⁸

At the same time that Tilton was designing the Richmond Branch for Philadelphia, he published a series of articles in *The Inland Architect and News Record* entitled "The Modern Small Library." Tilton opened by praising the modern free library as the most powerful

¹⁴ "Plan to Get Park and Library Sites," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 May 1907, 9.

¹⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Eleventh Annual Report*, (1907), 13, 24. Anna Weightman Walker was a widow at the time of her gift to the city. She remarried in 1908, becoming Anna Penfield.

¹⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, (1920), 19.

¹⁷ Bobinski, 64; Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-36.

¹⁸ Van Slyck, 57-58; "Obituary - Edward L. Tilton," *Architectural Forum* 58, no. 2 (February 1933): 12.

educational influence in the country, due to its role in life-long learning. He continued by writing:

Much credit is due to the influence exerted by the small libraries in assimilating and nationalizing the foreign immigrants, whose hordes apparently threaten to inundate and destroy our civilization as the barbarians did that of Rome. It is both interesting and reassuring, therefore, to note that . . . among the foreign born solid works on science and kindred subjects circulate more freely than lighter works of fiction.¹⁹

In keeping with his emphasis on the educational activities of the library, Tilton declared that “the books form the kernel and the cost of the shell should not be disproportionate to the contents nor to the number of people served, other the maintenance becomes burdensome.”²⁰ He then went on to enumerate a number of features which were becoming standard for modest library structures, and which also appear in the Philadelphia Carnegie branch libraries, such as a central charging desk, adult and children’s reading rooms, and lecture halls. Other specific features Tilton describes include high windows to provide maximum natural light with wall shelves below, electric artificial lighting, radiant heat concealed below and behind shelves, and “side entrances at a lower level admit the public to the lecture room without disturbing those in the library.”²¹ The Richmond Branch has all of these recommended features, as do most of the other Philadelphia Carnegie branch libraries.

Given his expertise and early introduction to the Committee, Tilton would be a logical person to provide a set of branch library guidelines for the Free Library of Philadelphia. However, evidence to confirm this theory has not been located. The first mention of Tilton in the Free Library minutes appears at a Board of Trustees Meeting on December 9, 1904. He is included in a listing of architects recommended by the Carnegie Fund Committee as the appointed designer for the “10th branch.”²² It does not appear that the Carnegie Fund Committee consulted with Tilton in the years until work began on Port Richmond, which was actually the eleventh branch. In May 1907, the Carnegie Fund Committee minutes mention that Thomas Montgomery, state librarian and committee member, “called to attention the excellent library building erected by Mr. E. L. Tilton at Juniata College.” The committee resolved to select Tilton for the architect of the “next important Branch Library building erected out of the Carnegie Fund.”²³ The Juniata College Library was a domed, Beaux-Arts structure with a T-shaped plan similar to the typical Philadelphia branch library.²⁴

¹⁹ Edward L. Tilton, “The Modern Small Library,” *The Inland Architect and News Record* 49, no. 4 (April 1907): 50.

²⁰ Tilton, “The Modern Small Library,” 51.

²¹ Edward L. Tilton, “The Small Public Library,” *The Inland Architect and News Record* 50, no. 2 (August 1907): 15; and 50, no. 4 (October 1907): 42. In a later article Tilton mentions that he used a “variation” on his scheme of concealing radiant steam heat behind the shelving in his Philadelphia branch library. See Tilton, “Scientific Library Planning,” *The Library Journal* 37, no. 9 (September 1912): 500.

²² Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 9 December 1904.

²³ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 10 May 1907.

²⁴ This structure is now called Carnegie Hall and used as an art museum, gallery and studio space on the Juniata College campus in central Pennsylvania. Interestingly, it was designed to serve as both a collegiate library and

On October 11, 1907, the Carnegie Fund Committee moved to appoint Tilton architect for the new branch on East Indiana Avenue.²⁵ By November 15th, the committee had sketch plans from Tilton, which they planned to hold pending official transfer of the site from Mrs. Penfield.²⁶ In February 1908, Tilton's proposed plans were accepted, with additional approval coming after changes in March.²⁷ In his "Small Public Library" articles, Tilton advised that construction expense for a small public library be divided as 75% for general construction and plumbing, 5% for heating, 5% for electric wiring and fixtures, 10% for furniture and shelving, and 5% for architect's fees.²⁸ He normally recommended that his library clients allow him to hire Hoggson Brothers Contractors of New York on their behalf. He would then guarantee to complete their building within the appropriated funds and hire a local architect to serve as superintendent of construction.²⁹ For the Richmond branch he followed the procedures of the Carnegie Fund Committee, allowing them to choose a local contractor from a small group of invited bidders. The list of invited bidders was prepared in April and by May the Carnegie Fund Committed "resolved that Mr. Tilton be requested to call here on his return from the South with a view to his making a final report as to the cost of the building, so that contracts may be awarded without further delay."³⁰ The contracts were awarded in July, with Fred A. Havens receiving the general contract for \$36,008.70, Keller-Pike Company received the \$1,150 electrical contract and Roberts Leinau \$4,104 for heating.³¹

The cornerstone was placed at a ceremony on October 28, 1908, with nearly 500 people in attendance in spite of rainy weather.³² Shortly afterwards the Carnegie Fund Committee resolved to officially change the branch name to simply Richmond instead of Port Richmond.³³ Constructed proceeded throughout the end of 1908 and through 1909. On October 5, 1909, John Ashhurst reported that the interior had been painted, wall shelving installed, and chandeliers and basement lights hung. Work was proceeding on "attaching combination gas and electric fixture to the top of the shelving." After the linoleum was laid, the building would be ready for furniture. At the same Carnegie Fund Committee meeting, an additional \$2600 contract to general contractor Fred A. Havens and Company was approved for site grading.³⁴

The new Richmond Branch opened on March 15, 1910. The formal ceremonies had to be postponed because of road conditions, but a large crowd of neighborhood residents

a public library for the town. A small elevation rendering and floor plan of this library is published in Tilton's "The Modern Small Library," *The Inland Architect and News Record* 50, no. 6 (December 1907): 72.

²⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 11 October 1907.

²⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 15 November 1907.

²⁷ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1908 and 20 March 1908.

²⁸ Tilton, "The Small Public Library," (August 1907): 16.

²⁹ Van Slyck, 58.

³⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 10 April 1908 and 15 May 1908.

³¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 1 July 1908.

³² "New Carnegie Library Corner-Stone is Laid," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 October 1908, 7.

³³ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 13 November 1908.

³⁴ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 5 October 1909.

came to tour the new facility.³⁵ The enthusiastic reception must have continued, for in the 1912 Free Library *Annual Report* Richmond was specifically mentioned as one of the “most useful branches” for serving patrons of “foreign birth.”³⁶ Like many other Philadelphia branch libraries, the rear ell portion of the space served as a children’s reading room during regular hours and a lecture room for special events.

Tilton’s writings on library design all emphasize planning according to formulas and established programmatic requirements. However as a classically trained architect and founding member of the Society of Beaux Arts Architects, he had a refined understanding of stylistic concerns as well. In the lead article for a 1927 *Architectural Forum* special issue on library and museum design, Tilton wrote:

Planning . . . unifies the heterogeneous elements into a systematic whole. Designing . . . produces an exterior of beauty, symmetry and proportion. The architect should combine the ability to plan and to design, in order to produce an appealing result. . . . Appropriate planning enhances the beauty of the whole. . . . The style may be Classic, Gothic or Renaissance, the materials may be marble or brick, but it is the spirit shining through that appeals.³⁷

It was clearly this ability to prioritize practical concerns over the visual effect of decorative features that endeared Tilton to Bertram. Even understanding this motivation, the Richmond Branch benefited from his sure-handed approach to rendering Gothic motifs and details in terra cotta and wood. It is not clear what motivated his use of this style for the Richmond branch since he appears to have used Classically-inspired library decoration much more often. Within the Free Library system, Spring Garden was the only branch opened prior to Richmond that exhibited similar Gothic Revival motifs, while the highly ornamented Gothic Revival structure for Falls of Schuylkill branch opened a few years later. Regardless, the Richmond Branch follows the Beaux Arts logic and simple practicality of the other Free Library of Philadelphia Carnegie branches.

In the decades since its construction the Richmond branch has continued to serve neighborhood library patrons with few substantial changes in form or detailing. Interior appointments such as the charging desk, shelving and patron tables have been changed over the years, as well as the floor covering and lighting. Most of the Free Library branches received new linoleum and fluorescent lighting during a major modernization campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Adding computer facilities was the focus of another, more recent, series of widespread upgrades at the Free Library branches.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

³⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, 18 March 1910.

³⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Fifteenth Annual Report*, (1912), 29.

³⁷ Edward L. Tilton, “Library Planning,” *Architectural Forum* 47, no. 6 (December 1927): 506.

1. Architectural character: The Richmond Branch library is an early-twentieth-century Beaux Arts structure with a symmetrical form, a formal axial entrance at the center of the front façade, and Gothic Revival detailing such as crenellated towers and pointed arch openings. The library stands one-story high on a raised basement. It is T-shaped in plan with a main block facing Indiana Avenue and a rectangular ell extending from the center of the rear façade. The walls are red brick laid in a Flemish bond with glazed headers. The window and door surrounds are rendered in contrasting white terra cotta.

2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The front, or main block, of this T-plan building is three bays wide and one bay deep. Each bay is large – on the front façade the large entry pavilion is flanked by sets of four windows unified by a single white terra cotta sill. The end bays feature a large arched window grouping. The rear ell is one bay wide and three bays deep. The bays here are proportionally smaller, with three pairs of windows with shared terra cotta molding on the sides, and one large arched window on the rear façade of the ell.

2. Foundation: Richmond Branch sits on an approximately one foot high cut limestone sill. At the rear of the ell some rubble stone foundation is visible beneath the granite sill.

3. Walls: Richmond's walls are dark red brick laid in a Flemish bond with glazed headers. The transition from raised basement to first floor walls is demarcated by a white terra cotta water table cavetto molding. A thick coved terra cotta string course appears along the top of the first floor openings. There is some additional terra cotta quoining near the tops of the gable ends of the main block and the open gable on the ell at the rear façade.

4. Structural system, framing: Richmond Branch library has load bearing brick walls supported on a stone foundation. The large trusses used to support the roof and span the open reading room spaces are hidden by the decorative ceiling.

5. Main entry pavilion: The main entrance is indicated by a front gable pavilion projecting from the center third of the main façade and the same height as the rest of the library. Patrons approach this formal entrance up a straight run of granite steps flanked by low walls. A pair of cast iron lamp posts that originally stood on these walls is no longer extant. Much of the library's Gothic Revival detail is focused here. A decorative octagonal turret with a crenellated top is attached to either side of the entrance pavilion. The entry pavilion front gable and the tops of the towers are filled with rows of terra cotta tracery moldings and panels with quatrefoil motifs. These terra cotta moldings have brick infill that creates the appearance of a series of blind openings. The doorway and windows above are framed by a monumental terra cotta Tudor arch, quoins, and square floral rosettes. The doorway has another decorative terra cotta surround with thin engaged columns and a high relief terra cotta panel of an open book on a banderole above the door. A cast terra cotta panel is above

the door with the word "Free Library of Philadelphia Richmond Branch" in a high relief medieval-style font.

"Lecture Room" entrances: Smaller square entry pavilions are tucked into the corners at the intersection of the main block and rear ell and allow access to the rear ell or stairs to the basement from either side elevation. A straight run of three granite steps with a metal pipe railing leads to each side entrance. The walls of these side entry pavilions are Flemish bond brick. Each door has a decorative terra cotta surround with Gothic Revival details such as quatrefoils in the spandrels, a slightly pointed arch with wide moldings, and a decorative drip molding hood with floral drop pendants. A cast terra cotta panel appears above each door in the hood with the words "Lecture Room" in high relief medieval-style font.

There is a concrete and brick wheelchair ramp that wraps around the west end of the main block, providing access through a doorway added to the west side of the main entry pavilion. This doorway was created by enlarging an original window opening.

6. Chimney: One tall brick chimney is located at the junction of main block and ell, on the northwest (Almond Street side). This chimney was connected to the coal burning boiler in the basement.

7. Openings

a. Doorways and Doors: The main entry has a pair of metal frame doors with glazing in the top half that replaced the original wood panel ones. The original three light wood frame transom and external wood panel pocket doors are still extant. The lecture room entrances on the sides of the ell have a pair of metal doors that replaced the original wood ones. There is a fixed three light wood frame transom over these doorways. See above for description of the decorative Gothic Revival surrounds for these openings. There is also a partially subterranean door for direct basement access under one of the Lecture Room entrances.

b. Windows:

The typical window at the Richmond Branch library is a three over three wood sash framed with terra cotta quoins and a drip molding hood. The bottom sash is rectangular and the upper sash has a curved upper rail. On the front façade these windows are grouped in sets of four with a single sill; on the rear of the main block the windows are in groups of three. On the sides of the rear ell the windows are arranged in three pairs. The gable ends at the sides of the main block have two single typical windows and a large arched multi-window opening in the center with thick wood mullions that suggest Gothic stone tracery. At the center of the window is a tall six over six wood sash with a curved top rail and thin muntins. This window is flanked by similar sashes with an additional row of three lights at the top. A fixed six light sash with a curved top rail and two curved triangular lights fill the upper portion of the opening. The rear of the ell has a similar multi-window opening, but with glazing only in the upper fixed sash portion and a brick infill blind opening on the bottom half.

There are rectangular basement windows at ground level and located under each first floor window opening. These windows have three vertical lights and wide, flat granite molding that continues the lines of the foundation sill.

In addition Richmond has small vertical louvered openings in the upper portion of the turrets and in each gable (two sides and rear ell). Tall two over two wood sash windows are located on the sides of the entry pavilions. All of these openings have decorative terra cotta quoins and drip molding hoods.

Metal security grilles have been placed over the exterior of all the window openings.

8. Roof: Richmond branch has a gable roof sheathed with red Spanish tile and perforated by skylights along the center ridge. The entry pavilion and ell create a cross gable roof form. There is a low parapet with terra cotta coping along the closed cornice and gable ends.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Richmond branch library has a mainly T-shaped plan with a main block, rear ell, and projecting front entry pavilion. The main library spaces have high ceilings and minimal interior partitions. The main entrance pavilion creates a rectangular vestibule leading to the main reading room. Originally low shelves served to demarcate different departments within the library (children's, reference) while still allowing personnel at the central desk to see the entire space. Some private work spaces and have been created by walls approximately seven feet high in the west side of the main room. New bathrooms have been added in a similar fashion at the northwest corner of the rear ell room (lecture room). The original circulation pattern of patrons entering through the vestibule and walking around the central charging desk to enter and exit is still in use although the original desk, rails, gates and other fixtures have been replaced.

Richmond branch has a partial basement with most of the usable spaces located under the ell. The rooms on this level include staff kitchen, lunchroom, bathrooms, offices, boiler room, and meeting rooms, and other storage. Original features on this level include five panel wood doors. Historic photographs in the Free Library collections show young patrons using the basement "club rooms" around 1910.³⁸ These rooms were simply furnished and utilitarian, with exposed pipes overhead, but matching furniture, nice woodwork and window curtains indicate that these spaces were planned and outfitted for library patron use.

There is mezzanine level room in the upper portion of the entrance pavilion that is accessed via a narrow stair in its east side. Its original use is unknown but decorative paneling and large opening overlooking the library indicate that perhaps it was an office space for a lead librarian.

2. Stairway:

³⁸ Photographs of Richmond Branch interior, c. 1910, Free Library of Philadelphia Central Branch, Director's Vault Collection.

There is a stairway between the first floor and basement levels on the east side of the ell at the crossing with the main block. The entrance pavilion mezzanine is accessed via a narrow wood winder stair located in its east side. This stair has a curved wood railing with a decorative Gothic Revival motif of rectangular openings carved with faux tracery to create a stylized quatrefoil motif.

3. Flooring: The floors are now covered by modern carpet inside the main spaces. The original floor covering was linoleum. The original hexagonal tile is visible in the entrance vestibule.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior of the entrance vestibule has plaster walls with two plaques noting the funding donated by Andrew Carnegie and the land donated by Mrs. Penfield for the Richmond Branch library. The main reading room walls at the entrance vestibule and inside the mezzanine room have decorative wood paneling. Inside the main library spaces the plaster walls and ceiling are painted pale peach with buff trim. Historic photographs indicate a darker and more contrasting color on the trim and shelves.³⁹ The walls have a plaster cornice that frames the top of the large, multi-window openings in the gable ends and the cased opening between rooms. Another wide crown molding is approximately two feet above and the frieze in between is periodically ornamented by a plaster cartouche. There are square pilasters between windows and other openings with wood paneling approximately ten feet high with recessed panels.

Plaster ribs ornamented with square rosettes traces the lines of the ceiling trusses with expanses of smooth plaster in between. This feature suggests a Gothic rib vaulted ceiling except the ceiling is not curved. A series of large recesses framed with thick plaster moldings are located along the ridgeline of the ceiling in the main reading room and ell. The main reading room has seven recesses with plain plaster in the end two and skylights in the other five. The center skylight is the largest and they all have square lights with wood muntins. The ell ceiling is divided into four deep recesses with skylights in the center two. These skylights no longer provide natural light because they are covered from above. There are rectangular coffers alternating with square plaster rosettes along the top edge of the skylight recesses. Rectangular slits above this line of molding probably originally helped provide ventilation. Large plaster pendants with a stylized floral motif hang down from many of the points where the ribs intersect the frame of the skylights. There are also half pendants at key intersections along the cornice. Several full pendants have been removed because of falling pieces, but are stored in the basement.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: At the entrance vestibule wall in the main reading room there are three door openings framed by thick wood molding set into a paneled wall. The center doorway leads to the main entrance and has a pair of replacement metal doors. Here the doorframe is rectangular with a blind Tudor arch transom and overdoor with bas relief quatrefoils in the spandrels. Flanking this opening are taller Tudor arch cased openings to

³⁹ William Rau photograph published in the Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1910.

the mezzanine stair and to the new handicapped ramp opening (previously this area was probably storage). These openings are both topped by a bas relief wreath set on a wood panel. At the mezzanine level there is a large cased pointed arch opening now filled with plexiglass. There is a Gothic Revival rail approximately three feet high across the front of the opening, with the same stylized quatrefoil motif as the stair railing. Inside this mezzanine level room the three Tudor arch window openings are set into a paneled wall with thick vertical rails, a drip molding hood, and carved pointed trefoils in the spandrels.

There is a large cased rectangular opening between the main room and ell. The doorways in the ell leading to the stairwell and side entrances have a thick wood molding in a pointed arch configuration with a four light glazed fixed transom. Each opening has a pair of doors opening into the side entrance pavilions.

b. Windows: The large multi-window openings at the rear of the ell and each end of the main room are topped by thick molding with a slight pointed arch that continues along the wall. The rest of the opening is framed by the shelf-height wall paneling. Thick mullions outline the shape of each window, which are divided by thinner muntins. The single Tudor arch windows are set into rectangular frames with plain molding approximately six inches thick.

6. Decorative features and trim: Painted wood book shelves line the outer walls approximately ten feet high up to the bottom of the windows. These are either original or similar and have adjustable shelves. This arrangement was typical for the Philadelphia branch libraries and allowed maximum use of wall space for shelves while still allowing for considerable natural light.

The large multi-window openings at either end of the main reading room space each have built-in bench window seat across the bottom with a paneling between the window sill and seat. Metal grilles for radiant heat are located in the front of the window seat base.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: It is likely that the original boiler system has been replaced. Radiators are located along the outer walls below the book shelves and covered by simple metal grilles. Additional metal grilles are located on top of the book shelves. The arrangement of radiators and vents follows the recommended standard established by the Carnegie Fund Committee in 1905.⁴⁰

b. Lighting: Historic photographs indicate that a series of seven metal chandeliers with round globes hung from the main reading room ceiling.⁴¹ These electric chandeliers had eight arms arranged in a spoke-like fashion around a central urn. In addition, sconces with one upward and one downward round globe (a combination gas and electric fixture) were mounted along the top edge of the outer wall book shelves. The original fixtures were replaced with modern fluorescent ones during the late 1950s renovation. More recent

⁴⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (29 September 1905).

⁴¹ Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1910.

renovations saw removal of the fluorescent fixtures and replacement with vaguely historic incandescent lights that bear no resemblance to the originals. A pair of cast iron light standards flanking the exterior entrance is no longer extant.

c. Plumbing: The library would have been built with basic bathroom and kitchen facilities, which have now been upgraded.

D. Site: Richmond Branch library sits on level ground at the north edge of a modest city park. The immediate neighborhood is primarily residential and densely developed with modest two-story rowhouses.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: A photograph of an elevation rendering signed E. L. Tilton, Architect is located in the Director's Vault at the Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. This appears to be a copy of a design presentation drawing; the whereabouts of the original is unknown.

B. Early Views: One exterior and one interior view of the branch by local photographer William Rau photographs were published in the Free Library of Philadelphia *Fifteenth Annual Report* (1910). Additional early interior photographs of young patrons using the basement clubs rooms are available in the Director's Vault, as well as a few undated early exterior photographs.

C. Bibliography:

The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Richmond Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief, during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott.